Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program
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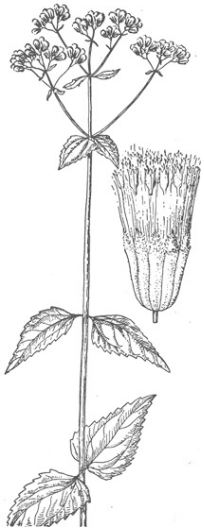
Lesser Snakeroot

Ageratina aromatica

State Status: **Endangered**
Federal Status: None

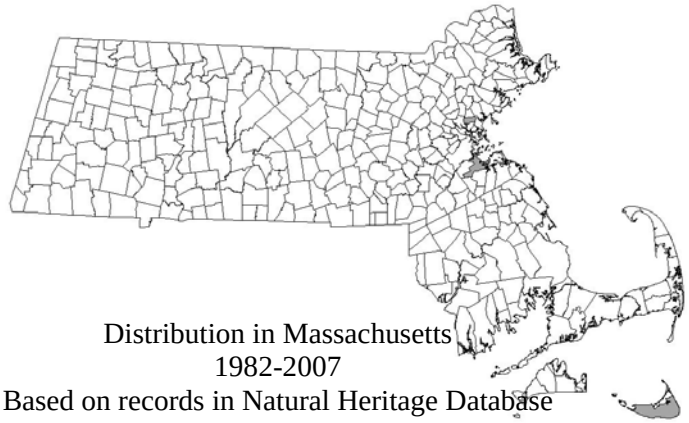


Gleason, H.A. 1952. *The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada.* Published for the NY Botanical Garden by Hafner Press. New York.

Description: Lesser Snakeroot (Ageratina aromatica) is a perennial herb of dry woodlands and barrens. A member of the composite family (Asteraceae), it has opposite leaves and white flowers that bloom from August to mid-September.

Aids to identification: Lesser Snakeroot can grow to 2.75 feet (80 cm) in height, but in Massachusetts it is typically less than 2 feet (60 cm). The stem is hairless (glabrous) or nearly so, and may be either simple or with a few branches in the upper portion. The thick, leathery opposite leaves of Lesser Snakeroot are 1 to 5 inches (3–10 cm) long and 0.75 to 2 inches (2–5.5 cm) wide, with short, but distinct stalks. The leaf margins have teeth that are rounded to acute at the apex. The inflorescence is a corymb (flat-topped open flower cluster) of discoid heads made up of small, bright white flowers. The leafy bracts below the heads (involucral bracts) are mostly even in one series and do not overlap.

Similar species: Lesser Snakeroot resembles the more common White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*), but has much shorter leaf stalks, and leaf tips that are blunt to short-pointed, compared to the long-tapering tips of White Snakeroot. Other similar species in Massachusetts include bonesets (*Eupatorium* spp.), which generally have involucral bracts that are uneven and overlap, and duller white flowers due to dense bristles concealing each floret.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1982-2007
Based on records in Natural Heritage Database

Habitat in Massachusetts: In Massachusetts, Lesser Snakeroot inhabits dry, open habitats of rocky slopes and sandy barrens, particularly in locations that have a recent history of fire. Habitats include dry, open oak-hickory woodlands and a mowed area that was formerly scrub oak barrens. Associated species include low heath species, Scrub Oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and numerous composites, including White Wood-aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), and Blue-stemmed Goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*).

Threats: Lesser Snakeroot requires full to partial sun exposure; therefore, forest maturation and canopy closure, resulting from a lack of natural or anthropogenic disturbance, often casts too much shade. Fire, which is generally excluded from its habitat, seems to be particularly important in aiding reproduction in this species. Invasive exotic plant species may over-shade or out-compete Lesser Snakeroot at some sites. Habitats along trails may be threatened by trampling damage.

Flowering time in Massachusetts

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
							■	■			

Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

Range: The range of Lesser Snakeroot extends from Massachusetts and New York to southern Ohio, south to Florida and Louisiana. It is also rare in Connecticut, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and its status is under review in several states. It is historically known from Delaware and Rhode Island.

Population status in Massachusetts: Lesser Snakeroot is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Endangered. All listed species are legally protected from killing, collection, possession, or sale, and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. Lesser Snakeroot is currently known from Middlesex, Norfolk, and Nantucket Counties, and is historically known from Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Plymouth, and Suffolk Counties.

Management recommendations: As with many rare species, the exact management needs of Lesser Snakeroot are not known. Sites should be monitored for over-shading caused by forest succession, and for invasive plant species. Habitat sites that do not receive enough light can be managed with canopy thinning or prescribed burning. To avoid inadvertent harm to rare plants, all active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) should be planned in consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.